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BRITAIN AND THE ALLIANCE

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BRITAIN AND THE ALLIANCE

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I would like to discuss Britain's relations with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in the light of the Nassau Conference, the collapse of Common Market negotiations, and other recent events. These developments provide a vantage point from which to inquire into the state of the alliance. If I concentrate on military aspects of the alliance, it is not because I think that economic and political aspects are unimportant. They are very important, but the military aspects are vital.

The crucial military problem for the NATO alliance is how to adjust to changes in the strategic balance which have taken place since 1949 -- when the alliance began. In this period the Soviet Union has progressed from a condition of little or no strategic power to a point where an all-out

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nuclear exchange would expose the United States to unacceptable losses. This is an entirely different situation from that of the early 1950's when the United States enjoyed a virtual monopoly on strategic power. Because of these changes, some Western Europeans have been asking if the United States would protect Western Europe under all circumstances against a possible aggression if this meant risking an all-out nuclear exchange with the Soviet Union. This has led to a condition of disarray which threatens the future unity of the alliance.

It raises the problem of how the new strategic situation can be met by the NATO alliance. Can the problem be solved by the creation of national deterrent forces, as Britain and later France have undertaken to do? Can it be met by some form of NATO deterrent? If these are not possible, can it be met by a European deterrent collaborating with or divorced from that of the United States?

I would like to discuss the British effort to deal with this problem by the creation of a British deterrent force. Before doing so, I would like to observe that it has become fashionable in some circles to downgrade the relative importance of Britain as a factor in the alliance. This struck one observer as being true in France where Drew Middleton, writing for the New York Times (May 6th) said, "President de Gaulle's public references to Britain have been remarkable for their jeering, mocking tone, as if there was something intrinsically comic in the United Kingdom and its policies."

The present is not the first time that Britain's capacity to contribute to the defense, or to the life of

Western Europe has been questioned. She was underestimated by both her allies and her enemies in 1940. A series of French and German leaders, intent upon securing domination of the European continent in the past, had their dreams of conquest shattered upon the stubborn invincibility and political skill of the British. One may assume, I think, that Britain will continue to play an important role in European and NATO affairs despite the cancellation of Skybolt and despite the veto imposed upon her membership in the European Common Market.

I think many of you will agree that British leaders hold views about the nature of the power struggle in the nuclear era which differ from those held in this and other countries. They do not see the outcome of the East-West struggle as dependent entirely on military capabilities. They entertain doubts whether technological breakthroughs will tilt the power balance between East and West decisively or permanently. Obsolescent weapons look better to them, as gap fillers, than they do to us. The British do not regard political or economic trends as irreversible. They consider flexibility in action, guided by good political-military intelligence, to be an important element of national power. Their intelligence is based upon a membership in CENTO and SEATO as well as NATO.

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Whether other countries which may try to create a strategic deterrent force of their own like it or not, Britain's experience in this field may well apply to them. For this reason it may be helpful briefly to review this experience and the foreign policy objectives it sought to

promote. It was an attempt to build an independent deterrent from a position inside an alliance which was already protected by the American deterrent.

In their decision to build an independent nuclear deterrent the British were influenced by a number of considerations. First, collaboration with the United States in the production of the atomic bomb ceased after World War II, and British access to American information on nuclear weapons was barred until after they demonstrated a nuclear weapon capability of their own. Second, in the days of nuclear scarcity, it was thought desirable to have a British capability to ensure the destruction of targets important to Britain but less vital to the United States. A third consideration was that of international prestige and the power to influence the actions of the United States. A fourth consideration was a determination not to be left out of important arms control conferences having to do with nuclear weapons. And finally, there was the aggressive behavior of the Soviet Union from 1946-1953 which importantly influenced the British decision.

At the cost of a thousand million pounds the British created a nuclear weapons stockpile and a delivery force of V-bombers. The process was not easy. The story of Britain's effort to build and operate her own deterrent system has been the story of a losing struggle against the rapid obsolescence of first-line military equipment, against the spiralling costs of such equipment, against the mounting requirements for penetrating the air defenses of a great power with certainty, and against the difficulty of maintaining a secure strike-second force in the face of a

great power threat. Difficult as the British experience has been, it avoided some of the problems that later attempts to build an independent deterrent will encounter. It at least came into being before the period of nuclear plenty in the Soviet Union and before the day of advanced air defense weapons.

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Many Englishmen feel that Britain's effort to build an independent deterrent has reduced or limited its ability to make an impressive contribution to the conventional ground forces of NATO. The British Army of the Rhine, which was once four divisions strong, has now been reduced to seven under-strength poorly-equipped brigade groups.

How Britain is to strengthen the Army of the Rhine and maintain the necessary bases and forces in the Middle and Far East within the present military manpower ceiling is difficult to see. This has led some spokesmen of the Labour Party to urge that the savings achieved by an abandonment of the independent deterrent should be earmarked for the equipment of additional conventional forces. They have not, however, extended their support of additional ground forces to the point of recommending the re-establishment of National Service or conscription.

It may seem ironical that just as Britain completed its V-bomber force and supporting units, there developed a widespread skepticism about the military and political utility of this kind of a force. Some Englishmen concluded that the possession of a so-called independent deterrent had not paid off either in the military or political spheres. It could not be used either at Suez in 1956, Kuwait in 1961,

or Brunei in 1962. Its existence did not seem to assure Britain of any special consideration by the United States during the Cuban crisis. Accordingly, a number of suggestions have been made about how to dispose of the V-bomber force. Lord Russell proposed to destroy it. Professor P.M.S. Blackett proposed to put the V-bombers under joint American-British control. Julian Critchley, a Conservative M.P., and Sir John Slessor suggested that they be placed under command of SACEUR. Richard Goold-Adams proposed to use them as a nucleus of a Western European deterrent force, while the Labour Party urged that the V-bomber force be allowed to fade out without replacement.

What caused the British to reduce the value placed on their deterrent force was the conviction that Soviet air defenses were, or soon would be, developed to a point where bombers could not be expected to strike at targets with gravity bombs. Blue Steel, a short-range subsonic standoff bomb was expected to give penetration capability to the V-bombers until about 1965. After that it was hoped that Skybolt, with a much longer range and higher speed, would assure credibility to the British deterrent until the 1970's. These hopes persisted in Britain until the time of the Nassau Conference in December 1962. Then the major hopes for the survival of the British deterrent were placed on a small fleet of Polaris submarines which, like the V-bombers in all circumstances except those of an extreme national emergency, would be placed under the command of SACEUR. In other words the British deterrent which was intended to be independent has ended up as a deterrent force committed to NATO.

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Britain's effort to secure an independent strategic deterrent has to be judged against the background of her alliance policy and against the background of events. This requires a reference to what happened after the end of World War II. It will be remembered that the coalition government of Winston Churchill was terminated by the Potsdam election of 1945 and that a Labour Government under Clement R. Attlee succeeded him. The Attlee government cut down on the United Kingdom's overseas responsibilities, transformed the Empire into a Commonwealth, and approved an atomic weapons and bomber construction program. In 1948 the practice of basing SAC aircraft on British airfields for varied periods of time was established. In the face of communist aggressions in Western Europe and the Far East, particularly in Korea, the British government undertook a costly rearmament program, signed the Dunkirk Treaty and the Brussels Pact, and gave a firm commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. In 1954 the British government promised to maintain four divisions and a tactical air force on the continent as long as the majority of the Brussels Pact powers felt this was required.

Partly as a result of our World War II collaboration on the atomic bomb, and partly as a result of the Eisenhower-Macmillan conversations of 1958, a special relationship grew up between Britain and the United States as far as information about nuclear matters was concerned. A revision of the McMahon Act enabled the United States to provide assistance to the British nuclear submarine program and information with respect to weapons designs.

It was natural that this arrangement between two members of the NATO alliance should give offense or concern to others. The resultant disarray in the affairs of the alliance was heightened by the cancellation of Skybolt and by the Nassau Conference which attempted to provide a substitute for it.

In December 1962, President Kennedy and Prime Minister Macmillan met at Nassau, confirmed the end of Skybolt, agreed to sell Polaris missiles to Britain minus their warheads, and arranged to have the V-bombers and part of the American Polaris fleet set apart as a NATO deterrent. Polaris missiles were also offered to France, but the latter, in no immediate position to construct Polaris type submarines or to provide the kind of warheads required, and with other objectives in mind, refused.

The Nassau Conference had important political-military implications for NATO. Shortly after it was concluded, France vetoed Britain's entrance to the Common Market on the alleged grounds that she was not "European" and would serve as a Trojan horse for bringing American influence to bear upon European affairs. Thereafter, the United States Government, acting on the assumption that Europeans were not going to be satisfied to remain under the American strategic umbrella and would not come up with a nuclear proposal of their own, put forward a proposal for a mixed-man multilateral force of surface vessels to be armed with Polaris missiles as the nucleus of a NATO deterrent force. This proposal has not been received with very much enthusiasm by the European members of NATO.

In leading off and summing up the parliamentary debate on the Nassau Conference, Prime Minister Macmillan described

the agreement as a natural development of earlier Anglo-American collaboration. He defended the agreement to substitute Polaris for Skybolt as something which would extend the life of the British deterrent into the 1970's. He held that the gap, which might exist between the time the V-bombers found it difficult to penetrate the Soviet defenses and the time that the Polaris force would come into operation, would be offset by the extended useful life of the Polaris force. He advanced four arguments for maintaining an independent British deterrent in the post-Nassau period. These were:

1. It was the duty of alliance members to contribute what they could to the strength of the alliance. Britain has a V-bomber force and should contribute this to NATO.
2. Britain should be an ally of the United States and not a satellite, which would be the case if she abandoned the British deterrent.
3. The possession of a nuclear deterrent has enabled Britain to make valuable contributions to the international discussion of arms limitations. Without this force she would have less say in these matters. This seems to be borne out by the recent test ban treaty.
4. A British deterrent will be necessary to prevent nuclear blackmail.

The Prime Minister defended the "independence" of the projected British Polaris force by asserting that from the time of purchase, these missiles would be "British property," operated by British personnel in British submarines. The Prime Minister suggested that the important

question was: should Britain have a deterrent force or not? He said that if Britain threw away its deterrent force, "nothing would stand between it and nuclear blackmail but the good will of an ally."

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While some of these things were happening, Hugh Gaitskell, leader of the Labour Party in England, died and James Harold Wilson was elected to succeed him. Gaitskell's views on NATO and defense matters were well known, but Wilson's views on defense, on the American alliance, and on East-West relations were described as being "consistently, deliberately, and cleverly ambiguous." Since public opinion polls in Britain showed that if an election were held in spring or summer 1963, the Labour Party would have a considerable advantage over the Conservative Party, it looked as if the United States might soon have to deal with a British Prime Minister about whom it knew little.

Interviewed by E. W. Kenworthy on his visit to Washington in the spring of 1963, Wilson made a number of policy statements. He said that NATO would be the center of a Labour Government's foreign policy and that Britain would do her share to uphold the conventional strength of the alliance. He said that Britain was moving toward complete reliance on the nuclear umbrella of the United States and that he approved this trend. In due time Britain would want to renegotiate the Nassau agreement and would seek a more formal method of consultation about the use of the Western deterrent.

Wilson gave hints that he might favor recognition of

the East German Government and the present Polish boundaries. He was said to approve the establishment of nuclear free zones in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, and Central Europe, perhaps in that order. Wilson said he would be "prepared to consider" a multilateral force but not under a command structure in which European powers could overrule the United States. He considered that a German finger on a nuclear trigger would be "provocative" to Russia. He put setting Britain's economic house in order ahead of entering a European Common Market. He felt that Britain's special relationship with the United States should be based upon community of interests and policy, not on access to nuclear information.

While some people in the United States may be pleased at the prospect of the ultimate elimination of the British independent deterrent under a Labour Government, there would seem to be little comfort in contemplating a Europe in which the Force de Frappe becomes operational just as the British deterrent phases out. This prospect cannot be attractive to the Labour Party. And it is not at all certain that a Labour Government, should one be elected, will do away with the British deterrent under these circumstances. Therefore, one should not be surprised to see the British deterrent force extended into the period of 1970, no matter which party wins the coming election in Britain.

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Part of the British difficulty in achieving increased economic and political collaboration with Western Europe stems from Britain's special relationship with the United

States -- particularly that dealing with the exchange of nuclear information. The second difficulty stems from Britain's desire to maintain a special relationship with the Commonwealth countries with respect to trade. But despite the recent collapse of British efforts to enter the Common Market, a good many Englishmen look forward to the day when their country will become a part of a European economic and political organization having close ties with the United States.

If the Labour Party should win the forthcoming election in Britain, it may affect the possibility of Britain entering into a closer relationship with the European community in two ways. First, it may make it easier to allay French fears by terminating the special relationship with the United States with respect to atomic matters, and second, in a way directly opposite, by being tough about the terms of entering into a future economic relationship with the European Common Market, a Labour Government may make such a transition more difficult. But the long term tendency for Britain will be to move toward a closer relationship with Western Europe when the present state of immobility has passed.

Eugene V. Rostow has recently suggested that "the issue before the West is whether the emergence of Europe as a political body occurs within the framework of [the] strongly developing institutions and procedures of Atlantic unity, or whether it takes place against the background of continued erosion in the relationship between the United States and our NATO partners." The solution of the deterrent problem in NATO will have an important effect upon the choice of procedures and on the outcome. There

would seem to be at least four major alternatives. They are:

1. For the present disarray in the alliance to continue with the major powers retaining their present policies.
2. For each power able to do so to provide part of its deterrent force for a NATO deterrent backed by the United States.
3. For the states concerned to surrender enough of their sovereignty to permit the creation of a European deterrent capable of acting with or without the United States.
4. For the members of NATO to leave the deterrence of general war to the United States and increase their capability to fight less than all-out war.

The British view would seem to be that the second of these choices is to be preferred while working toward the third choice.

The necessity for adjustment is not restricted to the European states alone. We in the United States must recognize the validity of the European demands for a share in the control of their own destiny as far as the employment of deterrent forces are concerned. But the Europeans must recognize the indivisible character of the nuclear balance of terror and in the words of Jean Monnet, "they must shoulder an adequate share of the common defense burden."